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ABSTRACT

The response made by the counselor and the degree of interpersonal relationship, which he involves himself, is important in determining whether the client returns to counseling or whether he terminates prematurely. An analysis of 44 interviews, 22 of which led to premature termination on the part of the client, revealed an astoundingly different pattern of counselor responses to which the two groups were exposed. Clients who completed counseling were exposed to counselors who were active, empathetic, confronting, concrete, and positive. Counselors of the groups who terminated early were passive, detached, unempathetic, and negative. The over-all difference in response pattern for the two groups yielded a Mahalanobis D-square of 107.94 which was significant at the .001 level of confidence. (Author)

THE EFFECTS OF COUNSELOR RESPONSE UPON THE PREMATURE TERMINATION OF CLIENTS

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The response made by the counselor and the degree of interpersonal relationship, which he involves himself, is important in determining whether the client returns to counseling or whether he terminates prematurely. An analysis of 44 interviews, 22 of which led to premature termination on the part of the client, revealed an astoundingly different pattern of counselor responses to which the two groups were exposed. Clients who completed counseling were exposed to counselors who were active, empathetic, confronting, concrete, and positive. Counselors of the group who terminated early were passive, detached, unempathetic, and negative. The over-all difference in response pattern for the two groups yielded a Mahalanobis D-square of 107.94 which was significant at the .001 level of confidence.

Counselor responses have a great effect upon the client. Benjamin (1969) points out several leads and responses the counselor may use to facilitate the counseling process. Certain responses may arouse anxiety in the client while others may lead to boredom and apathy. Not only are specific responses important, but the over-all degree of activity put forth by the counselor seems to be important. The counselor can be active or passive, accepting or rejecting, empathic or unempathic. In situations where the counselor is active and shows accurate empathy, the client has a unbelievably higher

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degree of verbalization. He is less inhibited; thus, he talks about his "real" feelings. Many of the clients prefer a structured, but "free" type of setting rather than a controlled demanding type setting. In controlled settings, the amount of self exploring activity of the client tends to decrease. It is also believed that lack of structure or excessive levels of ambiguity in the relationship retards movement in counseling.

The underlying rational of this study was that the same conditions which lead to positive client outcomes in successful counseling are either present or absent early in counseling and thus play a crucial role in whether the client continues in the counseling relationship.

It was thus hypothesized that the particular pattern of counselor responses and the levels of positive regard, empathy, intensity and self congruency communicated by the counselor are the primary determinants of whether clients terminate counseling prematurely.

METHOD

In order to test the above hypothesis, a study was conducted at the New Orleans Opportunity Center. Fifteen Employment Security counselors were asked to participate in the study. Their task was to tape record initial counseling interviews which were turned over to the experimenter. From the pool of participating counselors, four were selected each day to record the first new client they interviewed on that day. The counselors were instructed to tape the first ten minutes of the interview. The day after the interview, each tape was evaluated according to the procedure described below. Three weeks later, a second evaluation was conducted for the purpose of checking the reliability of

the rating procedure. Data collection was stopped at the end of the thirty days when 48 initial interviews had been taped. Follow-up revealed that 22 of these met the Employment Service criteria for being classified as terminating counseling prematurely. In order to equalize the size of the two comparison groups, four interviews were randomly excluded from the group who completed counseling.

The frequencies of each type of counselor response were tallied using a scale developed by Akridge. The Counselor Response Scale (Akridge, 1969) contains 16 different response categories, but for this particular sample, five categories were not used or were so infrequently used that the data was eliminated from the analysis. The remaining 11 categories are explained below.

Explanation of the instrument is as follows:

1. Accepting: Acknowledging the client's expression. Communicating understanding. i.e. um-hm, yes, I understand, I see

2. Clarification: Asking client to restate or to further elaborate i.e. "Do you mean that Jane only acts ugly to you when you are around other people?"

3. Evaluating: Agreeing or disagreeing with the thoughts or behavior of the client, sensoring the feeling or expressions of the client. i.e. "I think it is good that you've indicated an interest in Stenography." "You don't really think you'd just as well stay on welfare?"

4. Explanation: Structuring the counseling interview, giving objective information, explaining administrative procedures. i.e. "I'm here to help you find out what your interests and abilities are and to help you relate these to your vocational experiences."

5. Interpretation: Going beyond the client to explain to him the implications or meanings of his behavior. "You have told me of the way you resist your father's advice and of the difficulty you have with your employer-- Perhaps you unthinkingly resent all authority."

6. Persuasive Prodding: The counselor attempts to pressure the client into taking, or continuing a particular action. i.e. "These tests are for your own benefit and you really should take them."

7. Open-ended Questioning: Probbing into areas the client has not yet opened up for discussion or for details which the client has avoided. i.e. "What things seem significant to you about your experiences at X company?"

8. Closed Questioning: Probbing for specific facts can usually be answered with simply yes or no.

9. Reassurance: Supporting the client with statements calculated to reduce his anxiety. Assuming responsibility for the client. i.e. "You'll find the test to be not nearly as bad as you expect." or "You feel that your parent doesn't really care for you, but I'm sure she really does.

10. Reflection:

Content Conveying back to the client the essence of what he has previously said. i.e. "You have indicated that you have very little interest in academic work, but you are determined

to get a degree.

11. Reflection:

Feeling Conveying back to the client the feeling implicit in what he has just said. Communicates empathy, understanding, and acceptance of the way the client presently feels. i.e. Counselee, "I am flunking all my courses--and my--girl friend is going with someone else--and I just don't care any more." Counselor, "It seems to you there's just no use trying any more."

The second set of variables evaluated were the levels of therapeutic conditions provided by the counselors as measured by scales developed by Truax (Truax and Carkhuff, 1967). The scale is composed of four parts as follows: (1) unconditional positive regard, (2) accurate empathy, (3) intensity and intimacy of interpersonal contact, and (4) self congruence.

Since it was hypothesized that both the particular pattern of counselor responses and the quality of the counseling relationship were related to client continuation in counseling, it was necessary to make use of R statistical procedure which would capitalize on all possible interactions of the pertinent variables. A multiple disriminant analysis program developed for the IBM-360 computer at the Louisiana Polytechnic Institute Computing Center was used to analyze the data. This program computes a generalized Mahalanobis D-square statistic which is a Multivariate test of the difference between two or more groups when several variables are considered simultaneously. The program also provides univariate analysis of varience tests for each discriminant variable calculated one at a time. The program further provides

a classification analysis based on the largest set of discriminant functions derived from the multiple discriminant analysis. It was thus possible to ascertain the percentage of correct classification of subjects into the terminated or completed group from knowledge of the predictor variables collected during the first 10 minutes of the initial interview.

RESULTS

The combined effect of levels of therapeutic conditions and type of counselor responses resulted in a near perfect separation of the two comparison groups. The obtained Generalized Mahalanobis D-square was 107.94. Evaluated as chi-square with 15 degrees of freedom, this index of the separation of group Centroids is significant beyond the .001 level of confidence.

On the bases of a prediction equation, using a linear combination of the set of discriminant functions given in Table 1, individual subjects were placed in the terminated or completed group for which their probability of group membership was greater. The results of this classification is given in Table 2. It can be readily seen that from information concerning the counselor's functioning during the first 10 minutes of an initial interview, 100 percent of the terminating group were correctly predicted and 95 per cent of the group who completed counseling were predicted.

Table 1 gives the relative power of the various predictor variables to discriminate between those clients who terminated prematurely and those who completed counseling. It should be emphasized again that all of these variables refer to attitudes and behaviors of the counselor and not to situational or client attributes, though these attributes may affect, to some extent, the manner in which the counselor functions. Table 1 gives the therapeutic conditions and counselor responses in decending order according to their power to discriminate between the

two groups where all predictors are considered simultaneously. Univariate F-test of the difference between the group means on each variable are also reported. Standard deviations and F-values for these comparisons are given in Table 3.

In combination with the remaining Variables, Intensity and intimacy of interpersonal contact was the most powerful discriminant. The mean level of this condition was significantly higher ($p < .01$) for the group that completed counseling.

The next most powerful discriminant was the relative frequency of the counselor's use of reassurance. While the use of this response was low in both groups, the completed group did receive a significantly greater amount ($p < .05$) and this added greatly to the over-all of significance of the difference in pattern of responses.

The variable which accounted for the next greatest amount of difference was the level of accurate empathy provided by the counselor. Although clients who completed were exposed to significantly higher levels of accurate empathy ($p < .01$) this discriminant received a negative weighting. This suggest that during the very early stage of counseling, too much accuracy in the counselor's communication of his understanding of the client may tend to frighten the client away.

The fourth most potent discriminant was the counselors' use of evaluating responses. The frequency of this response was both low and equal for the two groups. However in combination with the remaining variables the relatively large, and negatively weighted, discriminant function coefficient associated with evaluating points up the importance of counselors avoiding this response during the early stages of counseling.

The condition of self congruency was the fifth strongest discriminant. This condition, at all levels found in the data, was positively related to completion. It should be noted, however, that the absolute level of self congruency provided by the high group of counselors was moderate. Thus, it is possible that self-congruency could operate in the same manner as accurate empathy. That is to say

that very high levels of this condition, early in the counseling relationship, could conceivably reduce the probability of the client returning for further counseling. In any case, the clients who terminated were exposed to significantly lower level of self congruency (p .001) than those who completed. The average level received by the terminators was 1.36 while the average level received by the completed group was 2.5. Thus, it appears important to provide a moderate level of accurate empathy during the early part of the relationship, but to refrain from overwhelming the client.

The sixth largest discriminant function coefficient was for the counselors' relative frequency of providing explanations. The amount of structuring the counselor does, at least for this type of client population, is an important dimension of counselor behavior. The completed group received a mean of 4.27 explanations while the terminated group received 2.45. This difference was statistically significant (p .05) when considered alone and in combination with the remaining variables was a major contributor to the over-all difference in response patterns of the successful counselors.

For the seventh largest discriminant, that of making interpretations, there was no significant difference between the mean number received by the two groups. The direction of the difference was that terminators received somewhat more interpretations.

The remaining eight predictors listed in Table 1 were relatively minor in predicting premature termination. This does not necessarily mean that they are unimportant with regard to the counselor's behavior but more likely that the variance in the criterion, accounted for by these variables, over-laps the variance already accounted for by other discriminants. It should be noted that the difference in means for three of these variables were highly significant (p .001). It should further be noted that for these three variables (reflection of content,

unconditional positive regard, and reflection of feeling). The discriminant function coefficients were somewhat higher for predicting completion of counseling than they were for predicting termination. Reflection of content carried a positive weight for predicting completion and a negative weight for predicting termination. Reflection of feeling carried a negative weight for predicting completion and a small, but positive weight for predicting termination. This last finding is difficult to interpret since it seems somewhat inconsistent with the general trends in the data. It seems unequivical that the successful counselors were greatly concerned about the clients' feelings. These results, however, would suggest that reflective responses are not necessarily the best way to communicate this concern. Considering the relatively small discriminant value associated with the variable, one could at least say that for this type of client population, being reflective or not being reflective, will not make very much difference in whether or not the client continues counseling. Another possibility is that the judge's tallying of reflection of feeling responses is more difficult. There is some indication that raters are inclined to count any response where the counselor used the words "feel" or "feeling" as a reflection of feeling. It is of interest to note that this is one of the less reliable (r= .62) Categories on the Counselor Response Rating Form.

Among the eight lowest discriminators for premature termination, there is one additional variable which warrants special attention. Although persuasive prodding had almost zero discrimination for classifying individuals in the terminator group, it had the eight highest discriminant coefficient for classifying individuals correctly in the completed group. While the mean frequencies of the two groups are not significantly different, the indications are, that within the context of high therapeutic conditions, the effects of persuasive prodding are primarily positive.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

To summarize briefly, 44 tape recorded samples of initial counselor-client interactions were analysized in order to compare the counseling received by one group of clients who subsequently failed to complete counseling with that received by a similar group who did complete counseling. Subjects were disadvantaged clients seeking assistance from the New Orleans Opportunity Center. The counselor variables considered included the level of (1) intensity and intimacy of interpersonal contact (2) accurate empathy (3) self congruency and (4) unconditional positive regard provided by the counselor. Also considered was the frequency of eleven selected types of counselor leads used by the counselor. The over-all pattern of counselor behavior to which the two groups were exposed were notably different. This difference was so extensive that with only knowledge of the counselor's functioning during the first ten minutes of the initial interview it was possible to classify individuals with complete accuracy as to whether or not they would complete counseling.

If these results are replicated with a different type of client population, then the results are astounding. No longer can counselors look to external factors for causes of why the client fails to complete the counseling process. Even though it is likely that client and situational variables affect what the counselor does, in the final analysis, the counselor must accept responsibility for providing the conditions which are conducive to the client's continuation in counseling.

The counselors behavior which were effective with this population of clients may be summarized as follows.:

1. The counselor was personal and intense in his interaction with the client.
2. The counselor communicated moderately high levels of accurate empathy in an active confronting, but warm and careing manner.

3. The counselor was whole or congruent in that his words, actions and feelings were reasonably integrated.
4. The counselor responded to specific and concrete feelings and ideas and avoided abstractions, generalizations, and intellectualizing. Where necessary, he actively prodded the client into doing likewise.
5. The counselor explained and structured the counseling process sufficiently for the client to assume and to feel reasonably comfortable in his role.
6. The counselor avoided being over-controlling and evaluative, but just as important, he avoided appearing passive, detached, or uncommitted to the client.

The results of this study are generally supportive of the model for effective counseling proposed by Truax and Carkhoff (1967).

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TABLE 1

Discriminant Function Coeficients and Means for Counselor Responses and Levels of Therapeutic Conditions

	Premature Terminators		Completed Counseling	
Discrim Variables	Discrim. Coef.	Mean	Discrim. Coef.	Mean
Intensity & Intimacy of Interpersonal Contact	4.11	1.64	4.44	2.54**
Reassurance	3.92	.14	5.44	.41*
Accurate Empathy	-3.21	1.45	-4.15	2.32**
Evaluating	-2.33	.32	-2.60	.32
Self Congruency	1.78	1.36	4.62	2.59***
Explanations	1.52	2.45	2.33	4.27*
Interpretations	0.83	1.36	0.82	.82
Accepting (Acknowledging)	0.33	18.23	0.32	13.59
Closed Questioning	0.32	23.36	0.39	25.17
Reflection of Content	-0.31	.18	0.62	3.09***
Open-ended Questioning	0.30	12.91	0.27	10.45
Unconditional Positive Regard	-0.19	1.50	-0.46	2.32***
Clarification	0.17	2.18	0.03	2.18
Reflection of feeling	0.11	2.73	-0.59	.18***
Persuasive Prodding	-0.04	.04	0.74	.45
Constant	-13.22		-21.99	

Note: Asterisks denote levels of significance for univariate F-Test of difference between means as follows:

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

***$p < .001$

Table 2

Classification of Clients Who Terminated and Those Who Completed Counseling from Counselor Response Variables

GROUP 1 (Terminated)			Group 2 (Completed)		
SUBJECT	PROBABILITY	GROUP ASSIGNED	SUBJECT	PROBABLITY	GROUP ASSIGNED
1	0.99423	1	1	0.97298	2
2	0.60857	1	2	0.74166	2
3	0.99952	1	3	0.61388	2
4	0.99948	1	4	0.96522	2
5	0.99420	1	5	0.55948	1
6	0.99997	1	6	0.99839	2
7	0.99765	1	7	0.99980	2
8	0.9963	1	8	0.99996	2
9	0.99716	1	9	0.99999	2
10	0.99744	1	10	0.99842	2
11	0.95805	1	11	0.96991	2
12	0.99711	1	12	0.99541	2
13	0.99697	1	13	0.99992	2
14	0.55326	1	14	0.98447	2
15	0.62077	1	15	0.99887	2
16	0.90771	1	16	0.89991	2
17	0.98938	1	17	0.99955	2
18	0.98960	1	18	0.97865	2
19	0.99939	1	19	0.89447	2
20	0.9981	1	20	0.99179	2
21	0.84564	1	21	0.99882	2
22	0.79850	1	22	0.57066	1

Table 3

A Comparison of the
Mean Counselor Responses Received by
Clients Who Terminated Counseling and Those Who Completed Counseling

		COMPLETED GROUP 3		TERMINATED GROUP		
	Responses	Means	SD	Means	SD	Univariate Value
1.	Accepting	18.23	10.98	13.59	10.20	2.11
2.	Clarification	2.18	2.34	2.18	2.28	-0.00
3.	Evaluating	0.32	0.78	0.32	0.94	0.00
4.	Explanation	2.45	1.82	4.27	3.01	5.88
5.	Interpretation	1.36	2.48	0.82	1.30	0.84
6.	Persuasive Prodding	0.04	0.21	0.45	0.96	3.79
7.	Open-Ended	12.91	5.81	10.45	5.98	1.90
8.	Closed	23.36	15.67	25.17	12.37	0.18
9.	Reassurance	0.14	0.21	0.41	0.73	4.98*
10.	Reflection of Content	0.18	0.50	3.09	2.54	27.71***
11.	Reflection of Feeling	2.73	0.51	0.18	0.39	13.63***
12.	U.P.R.	1.50	0.51	2.32	0.94	12.74***
13.	Ac. Em.	1.45	0.60	2.32	1.09	10.69***
14.	I. & IIC	1.64	0.66	2.54	1.01	12.50**
15.	S.C.	1.36	0.49	2.59	1.14	21.47***